

## ***Marine Corps Gazette***

### July Editorial: Searching for Lessons Learned

Marines heading off to war are constantly looking for the “edge”—the one thing that will ensure they come back from the battle alive at the expense of the enemy. The generic term used by all of the Services to capture that edge is “lessons learned.” In the old days time was a luxury, and attempts were made to codify lessons learned and incorporate them into doctrine. But those days are long gone. Young marines are returning to Iraq and Afghanistan. They need that edge now.

Doctrine and the “how-to” manuals or tactics, techniques, and procedures are still being written, albeit quite slowly, so we have to make do with what is available. And the lessons learned now come in all shapes and sizes. Some are immediate—resource driven—and basically relate to command and control issues, logistics support, or protection of the Marines in the field. Others are not so immediate and involve personnel doing something. Still others are informational in nature and lend themselves to various media, such as print magazines and the Internet.

*Urgent need statements.* The first category—that of the immediate need in the field—is handled by direct communications between commanders in the field and Marine Corps Systems Command (MarCorSysCom), Quantico. We have chronicled a number of these through articles written by BGen William D. Catto, Commanding General, MarCorSysCom.

*Personnel involvement.* A second form of lessons learned involves the interaction of individuals. The Marine Corps has very wisely convened a number of conferences that bring together the principal commanders who have just completed combat deployments, and they are able to provide valuable insight to each other and to those about to go on the next combat evolution. In addition, there are training classes both for units about to deploy and for individuals about to be assigned to a theater where they will be using specialized equipment, such as the unit operations center. Finally, there are formal groups of individuals who are assigned to combat theaters specifically to garner lessons learned. These lessons are then placed in some repository for future use.

*Information exchanges.* There are basically two ways to get the word out through media—by print or by electrons. The longer term method is through the print media where Marines provide feedback to other Marines through articles in professional journals, such as the *Gazette*, *Proceedings*, and *Joint Force Quarterly*. The faster method is through use of the Internet. Each Service has a center for lessons learned and a web site to access the material. You can access them all via a standard “Google” query on your browser. The accessibility and sophistication of

each center varies. The standard complaint over the years has been that too many of the lessons we ought to be learning are classified and not accessible to the individuals who need the information.

There are additional sites worth visiting. The Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory has a Small Wars Center of Excellence web site at <http://www.smallwars.quantico.usmc.mil>. And there is a commercial companion site not formally sanctioned by the Marine Corps but with a very robust repository of information, plus links to other key sites and a chat room or blog that allows interactive dialogue at <http://www.smallwarsjournal.com>.

The shift in the lessons learned business is to get more useful information out to potential users in a timely fashion. The Army has developed a series of interactive sites for use by company and platoon commanders. MCA, the *Gazette* staff, and key personnel at Quantico are looking at how Marines might create interactive sites that would allow for useful dialogue and then link interested parties to other repositories like the Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned to find more indepth information on various topics. The key is that the information and discussions would be unclassified, and access would have to be controlled through the military domain. Today we see e-mail lessons learned flying around the Internet. Tomorrow we will have a better handle on the entire domain of lessons learned, and they will truly be useful to the Marines who need them.



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